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FOUR POEMS

By LEYLAND HUCKFIELD

"WE SHALL COME AT LAST"

Tear-wet eyes leaned into the depths of my sleep
And a faint voice like murmuring of flowers.

"We shall come at last to a land of rain and light
Through hollows of dark woods and twilight shadows
And hear the tremulous thunder of the sea —

"We shall come to mossy meadows and white
Star-like blossoms that sway unceasingly
And ruffle and scent the ghost-robcs of night:

"We shall pass through a cleft in the wavering shade,
Ferns blowing about our knees as we go,
Emerald mosses sinking beneath swift feet;

"And so shall come to the shore and evening-glow,
Scanning the rain-wet darkening sands and afraid
That what was in far youth will never again be so."

NIGHT MOOD

Oh, to go out into the shadows of night
And walk in the smothering dark of a roaring wood
Where monstrous branches clash with mad delight
In the high wind's maniac mood.

To see the moon-eyes flare and flicker and glow,
To sense the bristling fur and the stealthy feet,
To shake one's shoulders and walk with a stiffening
spine;
To halt and snarl with clenched hand poised for a blow,
Knowing that once before in the dark it was so
In a fronded land where green eyes glared into mine
Through fragrance sickening sweet.

Oh, God! I have lived too late or over-soon —
This mood of night that is savage and utterly grim,
This longing for desolate shores where grey seas croon —
And ape-drums beating time to an endless hymn
Of thund'rous waters falling under the moon.

ADVENTURERS

We are tired of idle song
Who sit with clenched hands, glowering
Through open casements of the night:

The forests of the world are torn
By fangs of commerce — and the sea
Hides no last haunt of wizardry
Beyond her dim grey veils of morn:

The gods are slain; the shrouds are torn;
Only, above, mysterious eyes
Look down from black unconquered skies;

And our grim fancy swoops afar
And with mad scorn akin to hate
Beyond the barrier of death
Outstares the blazing eyes of Fate.

BEHIND BLACK WINDOW-BARS

Nightly through black window-bars
The same mysterious planets shine,
Like bubbles from a wizard's glass
That scatters froth of magic wine:
Nightly the golden bubbles pass
And sometimes with them goes the moon
And then I know the meadow grass
Is sprinkled thick with fairy stars —
But what have I to do with these
Who lie behind black window-bars?

Once when the springtide spilt its beauty
In winding petal-smothered lanes,
I wandered into a strange land
Where old gnarled trees were blossoming —
Now, as the tide of lifeblood wanes,
This memory looms as a vast thing,
As though stiff age *may* hold in hand
White bridal softness of the Spring —
But I — behind black window-bars —
Grow bitter with remembering.

And is there then by craft's appealing,
No way to cheat the wheel of years?
This plot of life is salt with tears
Where Beauty wept her sight away:
Now she has gone and there's no day
That promises what past ones held,
And there's no power of hope to weld

Or solder truth to what men say —
Behind my five black window-bars
The sorrow-mists grow thick and grey.

Only I claim due time for dreaming
Before the endless night draws down;
So I may go by field and town
Through sweetness that this earth shall know
When wisdom does not creep alone
Carving its proof upon the stone
Of caverns where no gay things grow —
Ah! let me dream — and, dreaming so
Lose disbelief in Beauty's star —
Behind my grim black window-bars
Let me be as the blessed are.

TURTLE

By MARY WOLFE THOMPSON

It was Sam'l O. Deitlin's seventy-third June. He sat on the new grass of the bank above the garden and soaked himself in sunshine. When he turned his head he could see the eaves of the old house in which he had been born, and in which he now lived with his daughter Mandy. A great spiraea bush like a white flower fountain hid him from the kitchen porch where Mandy was washing. He could hear her though, when he strained his ears, rub-a-dub-a-dub.

He lay watching his cousin Phoenix spade the garden. When Phoenix had a sizable strip done, Samuel would plant beans. Phoenix was awful slow, slower than molasses in January, but he was stiddy. Nice, havin' Phoenix live with 'em, company. Mandy was good; so was her husband; but she and Hiram were young folks,

didn't look at things as he did. Mandy sassed him sometimes, pretty sharp. Couldn't remember when he was young that he ever spoke to his elders so. Well.

He turned his head as far as the crick in his neck permitted and squinted at the sun. On mornings such as this when he was a boy he had gone fishing; cut a hickory stick, stolen some string and a pin if funds were low, made sure where Ma was, cast an eye on Pa, and then run lickety-cut, scrooched over behind the stone row, and down through the woodlot to the pond. Sat there for hours, ketchin' nothin' as like as not, and staring at the sun ripples until he was half giddy. He chuckled, gave a great owl wink. "Phoenix! It's a good day for fishin'!"

Phoenix thrust the fork into the dark mould with great deliberation and leaned on the handle. Phoenix was only sixty-eight. Sam'l O. considered him pretty near a boy. "We can get a boat from Cap Allen over to the Reservoy. You can do the rowin', can't you?"

Phoenix chawed two or three times, nodded and spat. "I thought mebbe you'd go down to the canal."

"The canal!" Sam'l O.'s contempt screwed his face. "That's boy's work! Can't catch nothin' there but sunnies."

Phoenix drew the fork out of the ground, sunk it in line with the row he was turning, heaved out a block of earth, spat it smooth.

Sam'l snorted. "Be you goin', or ain't you?"

Phoenix looked surprised. "Why yes, I callate to go."

"Pity you wouldn't say so. You ain't got no signs hung on you."

Phoenix turned another forkful. "Callated to finish my stent first, fur as the laylock bush. Mandy said we wuz gettin' along awful slow with this garden."

Mandy. Sam'l O.'s head came up like an old turtle's. He craned his neck around the corner of the spiraea bush and listened. Rub-a-dub-a-dub, Mandy was safe at her

washing. "We can do the hull garden easy this afternoon. We'll only be gone two three hours."

"The's a plenty fish worms." Phoenix turned another forkful.

Sam'l O. grasped the bush and his cane and lurched to his feet. "I'll git a can." He sneaked between the shrubs to the corner of the house, then up the little slope to the woodshed. No cans there, but some bamboo poles overhead on the beams caught his eye. He hooked two down with his cane, slipped around the corner of the shed and through the bars, down the far side of the fence, and hid them twenty feet beyond the gate. He chuckled. He remembered how to do it all right. Then he sneaked back again, and landed behind the spiraea bush once more, gasping a little.

Phoenix was forking clods steadily as a clock. "Where's the can?"

Sam'l O. had forgotten it, but he accepted no blame. "My guy, hain't you got no worms yet? Why didn't you get a can yourself?"

Phoenix paused.

"Ne' mind!" Samuel waved his arms. "Don't tax your brains to think!" He went across the garden, stooped behind the water closet, and came up with a tomato can and a bean pole; came back, the bean pole alone in evidence.

Phoenix eyed it. "That won't do for fishin'."

Samuel jabbed it into the ground. "That's jest a decoy. 'Here.'" He squatted, and he and Phoenix dumped the wriggling pink worms into the can as fast as Phoenix forked them out. "Ain't they birds? Night-walkers mostly." Samuel put a sprinkling of earth on top. "Now we're ready, I guess. You better git through the fence and go down behind it. I'll meet you at the gate."

Phoenix pushed the fork in deep. He looked uncomfortable. "I donno. I ain't finished my stent."

"Huh! You're payin' your board, ain't you? You ain't beholdin' to 'em, are you? It's me that's makin' the garden."

That settled Phoenix. He labored through the fence, disappeared.

Sam'l had his hand on the gate, Phoenix in view ahead, when, "Pa?" The voice came clear.

The old men looked at each other.

"PA!"

Sam'l thumped his cane. "Don't that beat the nation! You go on and wait, Phoenix. I'll go back. If she gits to huntin' and finds we're both gone we'll git down the banks when we do come home." Sam'l hustled back, stuck his head around the spiraea bush, "Huh?"

His daughter stood at the edge of the porch, her hands at her back to ease the long strain of stooping.

"Where you been?"

"Nowheres."

"Well, you took your time answering. The fire's going out. I've got to have some wood right away."

Sam'l O. turned muttering and went to the woodshed. Course. No time but now. He came down with an armful, scraped through the back door and crashed it into the woodbox. Mandy peered in from the porch. "That ain't enough. I got to keep fire all the morning."

Samuel trudged back again twice. Crash! There!

Silence, so he judged it was all right. He had his hand on the latch.

"Pa?"

"Huh!"

"Where's Uncle Phoenix?"

"Why, he oughta be in the garden." Sam'l chuckled to himself.

"Well, you help him get in those beans."

Sam'l grunted. He could hear Mandy slat the soap on the clothes. "You're worse than a passel of kids. Don't want to do nothin'." Rub-a-dub-a-dub.

Samuel made tracks for the gate. No Phoenix. Course the chucklehead wouldn't wait. He drew the poles out of the sumach bushes and hurried up the road. On the top of the hill he saw Phoenix's old shellback just disappearing. "Hi, Phoenix!" He caught up.

Below them Alamatong Reservoir lay under the sky like a piece of blue glass fitted into the hills. They stubbed down the dusty road and approached a little shack on the shore. Flat-bottomed boats were drawn up in rows on the sedgy beach, each with a few inches of water in it to keep it from drying out in the sun.

"Hi, Cap!" Sam'l O. dropped the fish-poles with a clatter.

Another old man poked his head out of the door. "Hello, Sam'l O.! Hello, Phoenix! Where you bound for?"

Sam'l O. waved at the poles. "We're goin' fishin'."

Cap Allen squinted, "It's a good day; mebbe a little bright."

"We want some hooks and a boat, Cap."

Cap Allen fetched out a half dozen hooks. "These do? They wouldn't hold a whale, but I guess they'll hold anything in the Reservoy."

Sam'l drew out a little black clasp pocket-book, and fumbled out a silver dollar. "Take out for the boat too."

"Tha's all right." Cap took out a nickel. "Wouldn't think of chargin' you boys for a boat. 'Course hooks is business. Got corks?"

"No, consarn it. Why didn't you think of corks, Phoenix?"

"Ne' mind." Cap Allen produced two pickle-bottle corks, and helped them set them on the lines for floats. "There you be." He ran his eye over the boats. "The Sally Belle there is all right; don't leak much." He untied the painter, and pushed it off a little.

"I'll get in fust, Phoenix. You're goin' to row." Sam'l teetered over the seats and sat down in the stern. The bow came up sharply.

Cap Allen steadied it. "You git in, Phoenix. I'll shove off for you."

Phoenix clambered in.

"There you be!" Cap Allen gave a shove and they shot out into water smooth as window-glass. Tiny crinkles spread from the boat on either side. They could see the bottom, starred with a beaded little water plant. Phoenix pushed out his oars and swung the boat about.

"Fishin's best on the far side," Sam'l O. said, and Phoenix began to row with short arm and wrist movements.

What a day! As the shores receded the sky seemed to get higher. Sam'l O. looked up. He always thought of the sky as heaven, more or less.

"Shall I be carried to the skies

On flowery beds of ease?"

Float off on a cloud or something, to the gates of pearl, piled up like white thunderheads, a little door in them, for the camel and his needle. The thought of shining garments and harps bored him. He came back to the boat.

A little breeze, smelling of sedge and new-grown things, lapped the water against the side with a sound like a child chuckling. Many a day since he'd been over here. Mandy kept him pretty close. Well, he'd foxed her this time. He craned his neck. "Le's anchor by that clump of muckshaws, Phoenix. They's most always pickerel around them."

Phoenix maneuvered a little, and Samuel plunked the anchor over, a stone tied on a rope. He made fast the slack, and they unrolled the lines and baited the hooks. They threw them over with soft k-loops, on either side, humped themselves, and waited.

Sam'l watched his cork take the ripples like a little ship, curtsying over the crests. The repetition of motion made him lose sense of time. Did the cork steady, settle, rise again? He wasn't sure. He pulled the line in. It came up lightly. Yes, the hook was empty. "Turtles!" he ejaculated. "Ain't they the cussedest things? Nibble, nibble, and keep tantalizin' you thinking it's a fish. Better look at yourn, Phoenix."

Phoenix's hook was empty. They baited up fresh and threw them overboard, k-loop, k-loop. So it went for an hour.

Sam'l O. had begun to roll up his line, when Phoenix stiffened himself against his pole and began to heave.

"Got a bite?"

Phoenix, a little red in the face, pulled steadily. The pole bent. The line was taut. It rose hardly an inch.

"Guess you're pullin' up the bottom, Phoe! Take it easy." Sam'l leaned over the side, ready to receive the guest.

The line began to rise, the gut of the leader showed above the water. "My Gawd!" A wicked black head appeared. Two hard little eyes.

"Snake?" said Phoenix.

"Naw. Turtle." They saw a round of shell like the top of a submerged rock, and four scaly feet treading steadily.

"Snapper, ain't he? Regular old grandfather," said Sam'l. "Bet he weighs ten pounds. Take your finger off clean if you give 'im a chance."

The cold little eyes told him to try it.

Phoenix looked rather low. "Cut 'im off, Sam'l. I lose my hook."

"Cut him off, nuthin'! I'm goin' to ketch 'im."

"You kint!"

"I kin! You gimme that chain." A bit of an old painter lay under the seat. "Now, you dangle it, and when he takes hold, heave in."

"No, I don't want him."

"Well, I do. I'm goin' to take him home."

"Not in this boat. Two's company, three's a crowd."

Sam'l didn't know when he'd seen Phoenix so sot. "Huh, he won't do nothin'," he said. "All you got to do is jest jerk the chain wunst in a while, and he'll keep right hold of it. Turtles are just that contrary."

Phoenix shook his head. "What's the use? He's no good."

"No good! He's the finest eatin' you ever et. I've et turtle many a time. It's sweet as chicken. We'll take him home and chuck him in the swill bar'l and he'll fatten up pretty as anything you ever see."

Phoenix picked the chain up dubiously. "But how'll we carry him?"

"Tie his hind legs to a pole and tote him between us."

Phoenix made a noise that said nothing, leaned over, and dangled the chain half-heartedly. When it had plunked the turtle on the nose a couple of times, there was a flash, and they saw that the turtle had seized it.

"Now!" Sam'l leaned over and grabbed a leg. "Heave!" The turtle came inboard with a great splash.

Phoenix was ready to go out on the other side. "Just keep pullin' on the chain. Here, give it to me!" Phoenix handed it over willingly. Sam'l gave it a few jerks. "See? He's hangin' on like grim death. As long as I pull, he'll hold on. Now you row, Phoenix."

Phoenix bent to the oars. They had drifted quite a little. He began to swing them round.

Sam'l O. eyed the turtle. It didn't seem inclined to give trouble. "What say we don't go home yet? Might as well fish a leetle more."

Phoenix looked uneasy.

"You ain't skeered, are you? You can get out and walk if you are. I doubt it's very deep. I want to fish. Let's go over further."

Phoenix shifted the boat once more.

They were getting pretty well towards the far shore. Sam'l reflected that there were lots of stumps along the far shore, but Phoenix ought to know that. He chunked along however, as if stumps were nothing to him. Nothing on his mind but turtle, thought Sam'l. Like Phoenix, one thing at a time. He kept a sharp lookout himself. "The's two snags ahead!"

Phoenix rested on his oars and looked. "Guess we can go between 'em." He began to chunk again.

"A leetle to your right, or you'll hit one of 'em!" They missed it, but there was a long grinding slide, and the boat stopped.

"What in the nation! Must be a stump." Sam'l swayed his weight and the boat teetered as evenly as a seesaw. "Can't you push her off?"

Phoenix pried in the water with an oar. It slid along the edge of something.

"That ain't no stump. I'll tell you, Phoenix. You see them snags is sawed wood. We're stuck on the side of one of them old canal boats that's sunk over in here."

Phoenix nodded.

"Mebbe if we was both to git over in the bow she'd slip on over. You hold the turtle." He passed Phoenix the chain. He got up, nearly lost his balance, waved his arms.

"If I's you I'd scrooch down and crawl," said Phoenix.

"Crawl on that turtle, I s'pose," said Sam'l. He leaned forward and hitched himself over the middle seat. Then Phoenix crowded forward too, the boat tilted again, and with a push from the oars, they felt it float free.

"There," Sam'l hitched himself back. "Now then, gimme the chain." He jerked it a few times to keep the turtle interested, and Phoenix laid to his oars.

"Course we couldn't a fetched up no place in the whole Reservoy but there," he waved his free arm. "You — "

There was another long grinding slide. Again the boat teetered gently and stopped.

"My guy, Phoenix! Can't you watch where you're goin'! I got to hang on to this critter. I can't do everything!"

Phoenix felt about in the water with the oar again. Again it slid along the edge of something. They looked at each other. They had floated across the open hold, and were on the other edge of the canal boat.

"Ain't we the fools!"

"Can't you push her off?" Phoenix pawed about with the oar. The boat seesawed. "Well, we better do it like we did before. The' ain't any more sides to run onto, that's one thing." Sam'l clambered forward. Phoenix pried with the oar. The boat tilted. That was all.

"Huh! This side's higher. I tell you, Phoenix, if you was to stand up, mebbe you could get a better purchase."

Phoenix rose slowly, set the oar against something in the water, strained until he grunted. No go.

"Sot harder than Pharaoh's heart." Sam'l was caught by a peculiar expression on Phoenix's face. He was gazing at something behind Samuel with a sort of sleep-walker expression. "What is it?"

"Th — the turtle!"

Sam'l turned. They had forgotten the turtle. It had forsaken the chain, and was headed straight for him.

"My Gawd!" Sam'l made a leap. The boat lurched. Dimly he heard a heavy k-souse behind him, but he had only one thing on his mind, and he hadn't much time. He succeeded in getting the turtle to clench the chain again, then he turned.

Phoenix had disappeared. A great riled spot in the

water from which wavelets were receding in ever-widening circles, told the way of his going.

Sam'l O. stared, jerking the turtle's chain as if it had been the rope of a fire bell. What to do? What to do? Then in the midst of the riled spot a hand appeared, another hand, a head. The hands grasped the boat's edge, the head shook itself and spat. Then Phoenix clambered up onto the side of the sunken canal boat. There was a strong resemblance between him and the turtle now, with wet and mud, and his old cutaway coat. "Guess I might as well push the boat off while I'm in the Reservoy. Sit down, Sam'l."

Sam'l sat, and Phoenix heaved and grunted. They moved hardly an inch. Sam'l began to take off his shoes, keeping an eye on the turtle all the while. Then he turned up his pants.

"What you going to do, Sam'l?"

"Goin' wadin'!" Sam'l was mad. He put his foot gingerly over the boat's edge on the opposite side to Phoenix, felt about with his toes, found the slippery old deck of the canal boat; then rested his weight on that foot, and lifted the other foot over, remembering just in time to jerk the turtle's chain. Lucky it took the turtle a good while to lose interest in the chain.

He stood to his knees in water like Phoenix. Brr, it was cold. A subtle little remembrance of the rheumatics he had had last winter floated through his mind. "Now then, heave!" he said. They heaved, and the lightened boat scraped easily over the obstruction.

It was a long way over the hill in the noonday sun. They trudged along in the wheel tracks, the turtle sprawling from a pole between them. It weighed a pound more at every step. "Wisht we was there!" Sam'l stopped short. "Dern! There's Hiram." He would have taken to the bushes, turtle and all, but it was

too late. Hiram had seen them. He appeared to be all doubled up. "What's the fool laughin' at?"

"Where in hell have you boys been? Hor, hor!"

Sam'l spoke from great heights of dignity, "Fishin'."

"What you going to do with that?"

"Fatten him in the swill bar'l."

"Fatten him in the swill barrel? Hor, hor! Not if Mandy knows it!" His eye fell on Phoenix who was drying in streaks, pale brown mud-streaks. "What happened to you, Uncle Phoenix?"

Phoenix began to get under way to speak.

"He had to git into the Reservoy to git us off a snag we was stuck on," Samuel explained.

"A snag, eh? Looks to me as if he'd been in head over tin-cup. Well, you boys better hurry or you'll get the dickens. You're late to dinner."

They could hear him going down the road, "Hor, hor, hor!"

Sam'l O. turned to Phoenix, "I donno what the world's comin' to. The risin' generation ain't like us."

Phoenix shook his head.

"Nope, we wouldn't a spoke to our elders like that." Sam'l cogitated further on Hiram's remarks. "Mebbe it'd be just as well to git this turtle into the swill bar'l before Mandy sees it."

They did.

Mandy was at the stove when they went in. She did not turn; sign her dander was up, Sam'l reflected. The table was set, and he slipped unobtrusively into his place. Phoenix lifted the latch of the stair door, going to change his clothes.

Mandy turned at the sound. "My land! Where you been?"

Phoenix looked at her beseechingly, like a child.

Sam'l cut in. "Fishin'," he said, again from heights of dignity.

"Was Uncle Phoenix the fish?"

"He had to git into the Reservoy to git the boat off a snag."

"Well, he better *git* into some dry clothes! Uncle Phoenix," she accused him a little more softly, "I wouldn't a thought it of you, sneaking off like that!"

Phoenix's hands came up clumsily, like a puppy's protesting paws. He looked so distressed that Samuel dropped with a thud. "It was me, Mandy. I got him to go, and I tipped him in."

Mandy turned on him with a pounce. "I don't doubt it was you. I wisht you'd fell in instead of him!"

"I *was* in to my knees."

Mandy appeared to leave the floor. "And you with the rheumatics! Now you'll be sick! I declare I donno which way to turn sometimes! What else did you do?"

Sam'l shook his head. It didn't seem a good time to tell about the turtle.

"Pa?"

Sam'l O., stooping over the bean rows in the morning sunshine, craned his neck. He straightened up stiffly. He knew that Mandy knew.

"Pa?" Mandy came round the spiraea bush. "What's in the swill barrel?"

Sam'l simulated indignation. "That's a smart question. Swill, I suppose."

Mandy glared. "What else?"

"How do I know? I don't sit on the led day and night to see what gits in."

Mandy stamped her foot, turned. "Uncle Phoenix, what's in the swill barrel?"

Phoenix paused, a bean-pole which he was setting, in mid-air.

"What makes you think they's something in the bar'l?" Sam'l cut in blandly.

"That's all right." Mandy glared again. "You'll tell after a while."

Sam'l O. saw a way out. "Why! Didn't Hiram tell you?"

"Tell me what?"

"Why! That we brought a turtle home from fishin' yestidday, and put him in the bar'l to fatten up. I thought of course Hiram'd tell you, and I forgot it."

"Yes, likely!"

"Well now, you'd a thought he'd told you!"

Mandy's eye sparkled, and Sam'l O. saw that he had divided her wrath. Divided wrath is not so deadly.

"That's a nice thing," she said, "a snapping turtle in the swill barrel. It might have taken my finger off."

"Oh no, Mandy, it wouldn't tech you. It'll just go to the bottom every time you go near there."

"You bet it won't touch me. It isn't going to have a chance. That turtle's coming right out, if I have to tip the barrel over myself."

"Oh now, Mandy!"

"Yes, sir! You come right up and get that turtle out of there!"

"Now Mandy, lissen a minute! You leave him there two three weeks to fatten up, and we'll have the finest meat you ever et. Turtle's elegant eating. Just two weeks!"

"No, sir! Not two minutes! I'll never go near that barrel while that turtle's in it."

Sam'l sighed. There was only one way, but he decided it was worth it. "Well, if you'll leave the turtle in the bar'l I'll dump in all the swill, and feed the pigs too."

Mandy cogitated. Sam'l could see her choke back a smile. She thought she was getting the edge on him. Mebbe she was. He hated handling swill worsen pizen; always had said he couldn't do it on account of his rheumatics. But the turtle!

"Hm, we'll see!" That meant she'd hold him to it. She disappeared around the spiraea.

Handle swill for two weeks! Mebbe he'd been a fool. He took it out on Phoenix. "For gosh' sake, quit holdin' that pole in the air! Think you're a statute?"

Two weeks. It seemed to Sam'l that he had handled tons of swill. Mandy had been inexorable. Every time he had just got set in the sun it was, "Pa? Have you emptied that swill?" Well, the turtle would be worth it, and now the time had come. They had assembled butcher knives, the meat-saw and the dishpan, had baled the swill out of the barrel, and tipped the turtle onto the ground, inveigled him with the chain. Then when he had taken a firm hold they had led him to the chopping block, and by dint of jerking the chain, persuaded him to stretch his neck across it.

"Now then!" Sam'l O. brought down the axe. Chop! Down dropped the head. After a very perceptible minute it relinquished the chain.

The body of the turtle moved on over the chopping block and up the hill.

"Hi! Stop him! Stop him!"

Phoenix turned him over, where his feet continued automatically and regularly to tread air.

"Them things don't care whether they've got heads or not, do they?" said Sam'l.

Phoenix viewed the head. "Gotta bury that," he said. "S'pose a chicken come along, or a dog."

"Or Mandy." Sam'l chuckled. "Take a toe right off. Like snakes. Don't die till sundown."

The two old fellows shoveled up the head and carried it gingerly to the garden. When they came back the turtle was gone.

"Turned hisself over and everything!" Sam'l looked around. "He was headed up hill." They scuttled up

towards the woodshed. The hind parts of the turtle were just disappearing under it.

"Head 'im off!" said Phoenix.

Sam'l grabbed a pole and poked under the far side. "Git back! Git back! He's worse without his head than with it," he puffed. "If he had his head he'd see us and go back."

The turtle continued automatically and steadily on, and it suddenly occurred to Sam'l that the turtle had no comprehension of the woodshed over him, and that, barring obstructions, he would come out on the other side. He did.

Phoenix stooped to catch him.

"Look out! Look out!" Sam'l nearly danced, then he looked sheepish. "Gosh, I keep forgettin' he ain't got no head."

They carried him back to the chopping block, and Sam'l O. dressed him. He wasn't careful. It was a mess. They scooped the meat out into the dishpan.

"What are you doing?"

Mandy's voice was so sharp that Sam'l jumped. "Dressin' this turtle. Look, Mandy, ain't the meat nice and white?"

It was. It mollified Mandy for a moment; then she saw Sam'l's pants. "Didn't I wash those pants a-Monday?"

"Mebbe you did!" Sam'l scooped out more meat. "This job's like hog dressin', can't do it in silks and satins. There, that's all."

Mandy grabbed the pan. "You're worse than ten boys!" she said balefully. "You can thrash boys!"

The old men spent the next morning in anticipation. They worked in the garden like beavers. At ten minutes to twelve Sam'l O. straightened up. "There, we got in some pretty good licks, eh Phoenix? Let's wash up."

They proceeded to the pump outside the kitchen door.

A strange odor was wafted past Sam'l's nose. He wrinkled it suspiciously. "Smells like a dead rat around here. Mebbe there's one in the cistern."

As they approached the kitchen, however, the smell grew in volume and intensity. "My land, Mandy! What smells so?"

"It's that turtle of yourn!" Mandy was mad. "The Lord knows how it'll taste. I ain't going to touch it. You can take it or leave it. You better not eat it, Hiram; it'll make you sick. If those two old fools wanta try, I can't stop 'em, but I can take care of 'em afterwards!" She slammed a platter of browned chunks on the table.

Phoenix looked distressed. Samuel was indignant. "Did you soak it in salt water and bile it up?"

"I did not!"

"Well, you'd ought to. That takes the pizen out. Why didn't you ask me? I thought you knew how to cook it."

Mandy almost took Sam'l by the ear. He flinched in spite of himself. "When — I — ask — you — about — cookin'! — it'll be a long day!"

Each of the men took a piece of the turtle. Hiram put a bit in his mouth, went to the door, spat. "My Gawd! Give us some eggs, Mandy."

Sam'l and Phoenix chewed doggedly, finished a chunk, and then Phoenix gave up. Sam'l glared at him, took a second piece, and attacked it. "Turtle's good eatin', when it's cooked right."

Mandy sniffed; then she became alarmed. "Hiram, make him stop. He'll kill himself."

Sam'l finished the second piece.

It was the longest afternoon that he remembered in seventy-three years. The sun dallied in the sky. Sometimes it did queer things, wavered, seemed to retrace its

steps a little. Sam'l went to the pump for frequent gulps of water. "That turtle's bound to swim!"

Phoenix assented languidly.

At three o'clock Sam'l thought he'd stretch out on the grass for a while, didn't feel just up to snuff.

Phoenix lay down beside him.

At four o'clock they were so still that Sam'l, rolling one eye, could see a bird hopping near them. Bird. Happy creature.

At five, Sam'l wondered if he dared straighten out his legs. He heard Phoenix get up hastily, stumble away. Vague sounds.

Phoenix came back, lay down.

Sam'l groaned. "I wisht I could get rid of mine. I wisht we'd never caught that turtle. I wisht we'd never gone fishin'."

At six he felt a little better. Mebbe he wasn't going to be sick. He felt quite proud of himself. Here was Phoenix, pretty near a boy, floored! Yes, sir; he, Sam'l, was quite a dog!

"Hey!"

It was Hiram. Confound the feller. Didn't he always ketch them at low tide?

"Hey, what's the matter? I bet you boys been smokin'! You'll get a lickin'!"

Sam'l struggled up.

"How's the turtle?"

Turtle? Sam'l O. couldn't bear to think of turtle, but he stuck to his guns.

"Turtle's good eatin'," he said, "when it's cooked right!"

CYNTHIA: A SILHOUETTE

By HELEN GENEVA MASTERS

"Cynthy, Cynthy!" The old lady's voice rasped testily as she laboriously leaned forward in her chair and tried to peer around the door sill into the hall. "What are you doing?"

"I just wanted to see if the postman was in sight yet, mother," returned the even tone of the slim, middle-aged woman who came in from the porch with her apron wrapped around her head.

"Always looking for a letter from Stella," commented Mrs. Curtis in an aside to herself. "Have you fed the chickens and worked over the butter? Lord, how I used to fly around to the morning's chores before I was tied to this chair! When it comes warm in planting time I reckon I'll get up again. I thought I felt a prickling in that right foot this morning."

Cynthia gazed through the south window down the long, winding road. "He's down by the Rice place now," she said. "He'll be here in a few minutes. I'll just go out and sweep the porch till he comes. I can't settle down to work over the butter till I see what news there is from Stella. She wasn't very well when she last wrote, you know."

"She's young, hardly thirty," poohpoohed the old lady. "You always thought Stella was going to die if she had a bilious spell or a bad cold. It's a good thing for Stella that I had some say in her bringing up. A little sickness is good for young ones. It toughens them."

Cynthia threw an old fascinator around her head, and, taking the broom, slipped out quietly.

Mrs. Curtis, whose sense of hearing seemed to have become more acute since she had been confined to her bed and chair, heard the honk of the postman's palpi-

tating Ford as it halted at the mail-box. She knew well enough that Cynthia was already hurrying down the path and doubtless receiving the usual Tuesday letter from Stella in Chicago and the paper from Philadelphia. She listened for Cynthia to come in and share the news with her.

The pendulum of the old clock on the shelf in the corner of the room diligently ticked the seconds to the waiting indicator, as if, shut tightly within its walnut case, existed some fourth dimensional world where age, spring-time and mortal emotions yielded to a transcendent interest. At the clamorous stroke of the hour the tarnished gilt tassels on the green lambrequin over the shelf stirred feebly, and the old lady clutched helplessly at the arms of her chair as she remembered that the butter was just out of the churn. If she could but make her limbs obey she'd have that butter salted down in a crock and things washed up before the clock could upbraid her again.

She heard the door open and felt the fresh air eddy about her. Why, it felt like spring! It would soon be planting time. She must get up. She would get up. Wasn't that prickling in her foot a good sign? "Cynthy, Cynthy," she nagged, "why don't you bring in the mail?"

The black folds of the old fascinator accentuated the paleness of Cynthia's sensitive, oval face as she stepped into the room with an open letter in her hand.

"Well, what's the news?" snapped Mrs. Curtis.

"Stella's got to have an operation, a serious one," faltered Cynthia with apprehension.

"Operation? Fiddlesticks!" exclaimed the old lady. "Doctors are always wanting to operate nowadays. She's run down with having those children so close together. That's all that ails her."

"She says she's been to the best specialists and they all agree. She's afraid to wait. Cancer might develop."

"Cancer!" scoffed Mrs. Curtis. "Cancer never was heard of in our family."

"Bright's disease never ran in the family, either," ventured Cynthia slowly, "but it took Delia."

The old lady's face remained impassive, but her restless hands fluttered over her lap as if a tightly drawn nerve had quivered.

"She's wanting you to come, I suppose," Mrs. Curtis conjectured.

"She says it's awful hard to find anyone in Chicago to trust the children with. She seems more worried about the children than about herself. Of course she knows how things are here. She thought maybe you'd let Sadie Brock stay with you so that I could be with them part of the time she's in the hospital."

"Sadie Brock!" exclaimed Mrs. Curtis. "I'd sooner stay here and starve than have one of the Brock tribe in my house."

"Sadie's been away to school, though. She's different from the rest of the family," pleaded Cynthia.

"Once a Brock, always a Brock," declared Mrs. Curtis. "If I'd let one of them in, they'd all be coming and robbing me of everything they could lay their hands on."

"Perhaps Arnold and Emily would come up for two or three weeks," suggested Cynthia, her forehead puckering anxiously. "Arnold always likes to be on the farm a while in the spring."

"Huh!" flared the old lady, "but not to work. I'm surprised you'd think of such a thing. What would Emily do without her maids? And Arnold, wanting to send me off to a hospital! I'd rather go to the cemetery. Why, it's no time for you to leave the farm now. The frost is going out of the ground, the plowing's got to be started; planting time will be here before we know it. There, I declare, — that prickling again."

The old walnut clock gave its usual premonitory cluck before announcing the half hour.

"Well on toward eleven," gasped Mrs. Curtis, "and that butter not in the crock yet. Oh, if I could only get my hands on this work the way I used to!"

Cynthia fled to the kitchen, leaving the letter on the table near her mother's chair. Mrs. Curtis' keen ears were soon satisfied by the sound of the butter slapping against the sides of the wooden bowl.

She took up the letter in her trembling old hands, twisted by rheumatism and work, and read through the opening. "Dear Mother and Grandmother," it began. The pages slipped from her fingers but the words supplied a stimulus that sent her thoughts wandering back into the years. It might have been yesterday instead of twenty-five years ago that she had felt Stella's soft little arms around her neck as night after night she had tucked her into her trundle bed, that long winter when Cynthia, then newly a widow, had been away at business college. Even yet she remembered the jealous stab she had felt at the child's joy over Cynthia's return. Always her love for her granddaughter had been a selfish love, with no power to project itself into a visualization of Stella as a mature woman with a family, assailed by disease or trouble.

The old lady's head gradually tipped forward on her chest and she dozed uncomfortably until Cynthia entered with her dinner tray and moved her chair over by the south window. The old collie, Nestor, pushed his way in and slipped his slim nose into Mrs. Curtis' hand.

Cynthia picked up the letter and put the pages in order.

"Don't you think I could find a nurse, mother," she asked, standing in front of the window and occasionally glancing down the road which stretched before her, crooked like an interrogation point, "someone who could take care of you long enough for me to go to Stella and stay till a couple of days after the operation? I'd be

satisfied if I could be there till she was out of the worst of it. I never have been with her when she has needed me most, — when the babies came and when they were all down with the flu. You know how father always had such spells with his heart whenever any bad news came.”

Mrs. Curtis' lower jaw stiffened. Her mind, feeding on the tasks which her hands could no longer devour, was unable to travel beyond their accustomed orbit. “There's never been a nurse in this house,” she asserted, “and I calculate there never will be. If you want to go, you can go. I'm not sick. I don't need a nurse.”

There was a certain quality of youth in Cynthia that made her recoil at her mother's unreasonableness, in spite of her lifelong rebuffs. It was, possibly, this strain of not-quite-crushed hopefulness that had made her life bearable. It was like her to have entreated her mother, although experience warned her of the futility of her prayers. And now, as usual, the old lady was using her strongest weapon to force Cynthia into submission.

“Why, you couldn't stay here alone, mother,” she replied mildly, as if speaking to an obstinate child. “You can't get out of your chair. What would you do?”

“I'd rather die here in my chair like this,” the veins in the old hands swelled perilously, “than let any of the Brocks or a trained nurse come here to fret me in my old age.”

Cynthia put the letter into her pocket but kept it clutched in her hand while she waited for her mother to finish eating.

“You write Stella,” directed Mrs. Curtis, pausing to drop Nestor a morsel of meat, “that I said she should keep away from the doctors. I've always known what was best for her,” she continued as if unconscious of Cynthia's presence. “She was mine in place of Delia.” At last she had voiced her lingering covetousness.

Cynthia's mouth drew in tightly at the corners and her

eyes, after straining to watch the farthest turn in the road, with difficulty focussed upon her mother. "I remember when Stella was born," she said quietly.

"One child!" exclaimed the old lady. "And you had chloroform!" She always found a way to minimize any claim of Cynthia's. "I had seven," her mind was wandering in the past again. She gripped the arms of her chair. "I chewed lettuce leaves." The pain that she had borne with clenched teeth, silently, the pain that had done so much to harden her, seemed to flow again through her nerves. The sunlight, caught by the pendulum of the clock, flashed intermittently on the wall.

"Drink your tea, mother," said Cynthia gently.

At last the old lady primly folded her napkin and settled stolidly back in her chair. "You don't need to stay here on my account," she declared stoutly, as the younger woman picked up the tray.

"I know how you feel, mother," answered Cynthia, her voice strained with the effort of self-control. "And I know how Stella feels, and I know how I feel."

The old collie followed her into the kitchen and licked her hand as, dropping into a chair, she bent over and crushed her apron to her face. . . .

Through the south window the brisk sunshine of the first warm day of spring set the usual seasonal plans germinating in the old lady's mind. "There's Lew Wallis, Cynthy," she called excitedly. "He's stopped his bays at the water-trough. Ask him about disking the south meadow and putting in oats on shares. The garden patch ought to be harrowed, too," she added, as Cynthia snatched the fascinator from its nail and hurried out. Alone, she picked up the yellow covered almanac and referred to its sacred pages. "Only three weeks till Good Friday," she murmured. "That ground west of the orchard must be ready to plant the potatoes."

From the window she could see Lew pointing to the

south meadow and she judged that he had agreed to take it on shares. And now Cynthia was talking to the woman riding with Lew. Who was it, anyhow? She wore a little blue hat and a veil, and gloves, too. None of the Wallises, sure. Lew started on, and Mrs. Curtis spied a suitcase in the back of the buckboard. It, of course, must belong to the stranger.

"Who was that riding with Lew?" inquired Mrs. Curtis as soon as she heard the outer door open.

"That was Sadie Brock," replied Cynthia, entering. "She's doing practical nursing now. She's coming back from Stanley Hollow where she's been taking care of Mrs. Hudley."

"Maria Hudley?" returned the old lady. "She didn't last there more than a couple of days, I guess."

"She was there a month, mother," answered Cynthia. "And Mrs. Hudley gave her a recommendation. Sadie showed it to me. She's a sensible appearing girl and she knows how to take care of things on a farm."

Cynthia paused and scanned her mother's face, but it remained rigid. "Lew brought me up a message from the telegraph office, mother," she said slowly as if speaking with effort. "Stella had the operation this morning. She will not be out of danger for a week at least."

The old woman looked steadfastly out at the south meadow and held the yellow almanac firmly, the tiller of her ship.

Cynthia watched her for a moment, and then, as if smothered by the confusion of thoughts rising in her, fumbled her way into the kitchen.

Her hands, following the routine of years, washed the dishes, scalded the bread jar and set it in the sun. Her eyes scanned the old winding road and tried to pierce beyond the curve where it twisted down to the telegraph office and the railroad. Every bush, every tree, almost every fence-post she knew, and yet now, in the intentness

of her gaze, they seemed to take form like black messengers and move slowly toward her.

How many times she had been crushed between the millstones of conflicting duties, with hardly a chance to decide which obligation was superior, so enslaved was she by the duty close at hand! Now, however, she realized that Stella would not have urged her to come unless there had been some imperative necessity, some threatening probability that had not been stated. The appeal to mother the children expanded in Cynthia's heart. The baby, which she had not yet seen, became a convincing suppliant by reason of its helplessness. They needed her. . . . It was the claim of youth against age. . . . In the sunny afternoon stillness Cynthia began to feel as if she were afloat on a great river, slipping by a long, low, rocky island, the island of her past. The only doubt that continually impeded her progress was the thought that inclination and duty had never before pointed so clearly in the same direction.

From the lower shelf of the old-fashioned safe she drew out a shabby satchel, dusted it and opened it. Nestor approached and nosed it curiously. From the clothes bars she took a freshly ironed house dress, a skirt, and some aprons, nervously folded them and laid them in the grip. The dog whined softly and looked at her questioningly. A sense of rebuke, as if the old home had reproached her, blurred her clear vision of duty.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" cried Cynthia. Distractedly she took out the clothing and laid it upon a chair.

Mrs. Curtis, in the other room, pulled the family album toward her, released the clasp that held the faded plush covers and lingeringly turned the stiff, gilt-edged pages. Ah, here was Stella, an infant, with a golden curl inserted in a corner of the slot that held the photograph. The old woman fingered the soft, clinging hair. A

vagueness like a mist filled her mind. She held her reading glass over the picture. "Delia," she murmured, "yes, Delia." . . .

The dingy tassels on the old lambrequin trembled as a biting north wind stole in.

"Cynthy, Cynthy," Mrs. Curtis called querulously, "put me into bed. The wind must be changing. I'm cold."

Cynthia moved the chair into the bedroom and made her mother comfortable for the night. Against the white pillows, how faded and shrunken the old form looked, and how pitiful seemed her feeble attempts to move her limbs! Her eyes dully followed Cynthia as she brought in a hot water bottle and arranged it at the foot of the bed.

"Do you want your supper now, mother?" inquired Cynthia.

"No," replied Mrs. Curtis, closing her eyes. "I'm going to take a nap."

Cynthia returned to the kitchen and her feverish watch of the road. The north wind spoke warningly to the rising sap in the trees and speedily forced the sun out of the quiet valley. The road became indistinct, murky, then completely lost in darkness, like the oblivion of anesthesia.

From the bracket shelf Cynthia took the large glass lamp, lighted its evenly clipped wick, and set it upon the drop-leaf table. With gathering resolution she again folded her clothing and crammed it into the gaping mouth of the satchel. Listening for footsteps or the sound of a cart wheeling up the road, she ran to the front door and stood alert on the porch. The cold wind dashed into the house and jerked the green lambrequin. The lamp flame flared, smoking the clean glass globe. Stopping at the hall closet, she brought out her black broad-cloth suit and her velvet toque. The skirt, wrinkled from

hanging at the loops, must be pressed and the hat must be brushed. She pulled the flatirons forward on the stove to heat, and impatiently tested them until they sizzed. The old lady's heavy breathing, the mechanical ticking of the clock, and the click of the iron as now and then she set it upon its stand were the only sounds to relieve the stillness.

Without a glance in the mirror Cynthia hurried into her suit and crushed the hat down upon her head. Reaching for the satchel, she felt her hand pushed aside by the cold nose of the watchful collie. But the reproach in Nestor's eyes now seemed no more than the query of an alien. It could no longer detain her. "You don't understand," she murmured, picking up the valise. "To go is my duty."

"Cynthy, Cynthy," — the old lady's voice reached her as she turned the doorknob.

She set down the bag and entered her mother's room calmly. "Yes, mother," she said, bending over the bed.

Mrs. Curtis stared at her, not recognising this strangely garbed figure. "Cynthy?" she asked.

"Yes, mother. I'm going to Stella and Stella's children. I'll telephone Sadie Brock from Rice's. You'll not be alone more than a half hour."

"You — going?" exclaimed the old lady, clutching at the bed clothes as if she were drawing up on the lines to check a runaway horse.

"Yes, mother," replied Cynthia quietly, positively; as it were, freed from her old serfdom and endowed with some new spiritual enfranchisement. At one with the gray morning into which she stepped Cynthia softly closed the door of the house. Buoyed up by some vast patience, some vague consciousness of the inevitable on-flow of life itself, she passed out into the chilly mist.

BRIEF REVIEWS

In Unfamiliar England with a Motor Car, by THOMAS D. MURPHY. (Reissue, The Page Company, \$6.00.) The new edition of Mr. Murphy's record of English travel is particularly welcome and I have read the book with a high degree of pleasure. The volume has the qualities of fine craftsmanship which make instant appeal to the book-lover: excellent paper and binding, large type of especial beauty, and carefully chosen and meaningful illustrations, abundant but not too numerous. Mr. Murphy's writing is such as to deserve the form in which it appears. His narrative is full of information, but is never pedantic or tiresome; and it attains genuine informality without becoming trivial. Altogether this is a travel book vastly above the average of its class.

J. T. F.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

MARY WOLFE THOMPSON is known to readers of THE MIDLAND as the author of "Old Diz", a story published in our issue for April, 1923. She has also written stories which have appeared in other magazines, and two delightful books for children, *Farm-town Tales* and *Shoemaker's Shoes*, both published by Dutton.

HELEN GENEVA MASTERS is the author of stories which have appeared in *Munsey's* and other magazines. She was born in Pennsylvania, and was graduated at the University of Nebraska. Mrs. Masters has four children. Her home is in Omaha, where her husband is the principal of the Central High School.

LEYLAND HUCKFIELD, author of *Rough Trails and Silver Meadows* and one of the most valued contributors to THE MIDLAND, died at Rochester, Minnesota, in May, 1923. The issue of THE MIDLAND for December, 1923, was devoted entirely to poems selected from the work left unpublished at his death; the present group represents a further and perhaps final selection from his papers.

